

VZCZCXYZ0000
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHBU #0928/01 1311925
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 111925Z MAY 07
FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8117

C O N F I D E N T I A L BUENOS AIRES 000928

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

FOR INR
OES FOR DANIEL SINGER AIAG

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/11/2017
TAGS: [PINR](#) [KFLU](#) [AR](#)
SUBJECT: C-TN7-00406: ARGENTINE POSITIONS ON SAMPLE SHARING
AND VACCINE ACCESS

REF: SECSTATE 62185

Classified By: AMB E. ANTHONY WAYNE, FOR REASON 1.4(C)

Summary

¶1. (U) Emboff met on May 10, 2007 with Argentine Ministry of Health official Dr. Hugo Fernandez to clarify Argentina's positions on Reftel questions. Argentina has to date been an eager partner on the full spectrum of pandemic preparedness cooperation. Dr. Fernandez was unable to address many of the questions included in reftel, especially those related to pricing and preferential treatment for certain countries providing samples, but outlined the MOH's general views regarding the handling of samples and vaccine production. End Summary

Answers for Reftel Paragraph 4 Subparagraphs A and B

¶2. (U) The Government of Argentina (GOA) readily shares samples with the CDC and WHO. Dr. Fernandez does not foresee a change in their willingness to cooperate and noted that "scientific and technical cooperation is the essential element" to any preparedness effort. He was unable or unwilling to address the more specific questions. Fernandez repeatedly made clear that Argentina recognizes "universal access" to healthcare as a basic "human right."

¶3. (C) Comment: On several occasions Fernandez began to describe his personal views, but stopped himself. Ministry of Health officials tend to regard Argentina's constitutional guarantee of universal healthcare as their central mission and often regard the U.S. private healthcare system as a threat to that perceived right. During routine meetings and conversations, Emboffs are often lectured on the "injustice" of American pharmaceutical companies, and on at least one occasion, MOH officials have held out the Cuban healthcare system as a model worthy of emulation. That being said, Argentina's receipt, in 2006, of a nearly one million dollar HHS/CDC pandemic influenza detection and preparedness grant is a significant factor in the bilateral relationship. Fernandez was careful to avoid any position with regard to "equitable access," other than to reiterate Argentina's philosophical human rights position.

Answers for Reftel Paragraph 4 Subparagraphs C and D

¶4. (U) Fernandez told Emboff that MERCOSUR had begun preliminary discussions to "regionalize" pandemic influenza

response. However, he noted that those talks are at an early and informal stage. Argentina will be a player in Southern Cone regional preparedness efforts, and a significant element of Argentina's grant proposal to HHS calls for Argentina to offer training and technical assistance to the region. The MOH currently purchases seasonal influenza vaccine, which is used to target specific risk groups. The seasonal vaccine is also widely used by private physicians as a standard provision of care. In Argentina, vaccine production is conducted entirely by private companies. In some cases the firms contract directly with the MOH. Fernandez said that there is little or no vaccine development in Argentina. The GOA funds the few exceptions.

Answers for Reftel Paragraph 4 Subparagraphs F and G

15. (U) Director of Foreign Relations for the MOH Sebastian Tobar was unavailable to meet, due to "preparations for the World Health Assembly." Fernandez was unable or unwilling to address the specific positions the GOA might take on viral sharing or vaccine access. While he offered no indication of Argentina's positions in Geneva, Fernandez made every effort to highlight the HHS agreement and the strong cooperation with the U.S.

16. (C) Comment: Sebastian Tobar is the Embassy's primary interlocutor at the Ministry of Health and a occasionally sharp critic of the U.S., especially the U.S. private healthcare system. He rarely misses an opportunity to share his views regarding what he calls the "ideological differences" between the U.S. and Argentina and has even managed to turn a routine conversation about major health issues into lecture about the immorality of the War on Terror. However, the pandemic influenza preparedness grant and agreement between the MOH and HHS represents a significant investment to a historically under funded ministry, and the Minister of Health has identified the cooperation as a centerpiece of the bilateral relationship. As a consequence, we believe that the views of Tobar and other mid-grade officials at the Ministry of Health will have little effect on Argentine positions in Geneva.
WAYNE